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February 18, 2017

Appropriations Committee

Subject: Budget Hearing on the DDS Budget

To the Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am writing regarding the Governor's FY 2018 - FY 2019 budget recommendations for the Department of Developmental Services. I am the mother of a 15 year old daughter with ID and autism.

First, I would like to express my gratitude that the Governor has committed significant funding, thus proposing positive steps, to begin to address the residential waiting list crisis and to begin to stabilize community supports. These proposals show that Governor Malloy recognizes these critical issues and is focused on improving the current system. I ask that the committee support this funding.

However, I am alarmed that there is no funding for new graduates with I/DD in either year of the two year budget proposal as well as a significant decrease to existing funding for Family Support Grants.

My husband and I have spent thousands of our own dollars on private therapies, social skills instruction, and counseling to prepare our daughter to transition from school to community living. Our school district has also committed staff and resources during the entire course of her educational career to prepare her for transition. The school district and we as parents know how critical it is to prepare our daughter to be as employable and independent to the best of her ability.

To then have no transitional supports for our daughter upon graduation from school based services is a scary proposition. People with disabilities face high unemployment rates and funding for new graduates is essential for job coaching and training. Transferring the burden of the cost of job coaching, placement and training to parents and families will put a strain on households already facing the financial burden of years of caring for a loved one with a disability. I personally have had to work part-time or work in a low paying position that offers schedule flexibility due to lack of affordable, appropriate care for my daughter when she is not in school. We paid our 2016 summer care provider more per hour than I earn hourly.

In addition, I would like the committee members to please consider how important the Family Support Grants are to children like my daughter and our family. For the past several years, DDS

has given our daughter a grant to attend two weeks of day camp at Camp Harkness through the ARC of New London County. This day camp is the highlight of our daughter's summer. It is a supportive, nurturing, fun place for our daughter. We feel the camp offers a safe, enriching and appropriately staffed environment for our daughter which a typical camp will not or cannot provide.

A week of day camp costs \$590.00. It is worth every penny when we see how much Lauren loves being at Camp Harkness. However, we would never be able to afford on our own to send our daughter to this camp without the support of a DDS family support grant. We have been tremendously grateful for past DDS financial support as it allows us to give our daughter a summer camp experience, in which all children should have the opportunity to participate. And I know personally know other families who have used family support grants to pay for child care and respite care that they could not afford on their own.

Please do not cut funding to the Family Support Grants, and restore funding for new graduates in the FY 2018-FY2019 budget. Otherwise, the cost to people with I/DD and the burden to us and other Connecticut families are too much to ignore.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Sally Huck

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